

BLM News

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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2006 Pre Fire Season #4, final in the series

REPORTING FIRES AND PLANNING FOR THE WORST

“We find out about most wildfires because someone calls us on the phone and tells us there’s a fire,” said Elko Interagency Dispatch Manager Bill Roach.

“The effectiveness of our initial response depends on the quality and accuracy of information we get over the phone.” Dispatchers will ask people several questions:

- *What is your name and where are you right now?*
- *Which direction is the smoke from where you’re standing and about how far away is it?*
- *What color is the smoke?* (A small column of white smoke could be a diesel engine starting. Knowing the color of the smoke helps the dispatcher know what type of fire it may be.)
- *How big does the fire look to you?*
- *Does the fire appear to be getting bigger?*
- *What is your phone number so we can call you back?* (Sometimes fire fighters have difficulty finding the fire and have to call the reporting party for more information.)
- ***Can you see the flames? If so, you may be too close to the fire!***

“To report fires, people can call 911, or 748-4000, or 738-FIRE. If we know a controlled burn is going on, we will do our best to get word out in the media so folks know ahead of time,” Roach added.

“I can think of few things more upsetting for anyone than the prospect of losing their home,” said Nevada Division of Forestry Acting Regional Forester Tom Turk. “In 2005, we were faced with several instances of voluntary evacuations and did the initial planning for others that didn’t happen. The Chance Fire was particularly frightening for many people. We recommend that folks think ahead – before fire season – to determine what are the items that can’t be replaced. Typically, those items include family memorabilia, videos, important papers, and small keepsakes. These are the items of sentimental value and can’t be purchased. We encourage people to box those

items and keep them by a window or a door so they can be grabbed on the way out of the house in case there's an evacuation."

"People with pets or livestock should plan ahead as well. Make arrangements with friends or have predetermined locations where animals could be moved on short notice to get them out of harm's way," Turk continued. "The worst time to plan for an evacuation is when it's taking place. Plan ahead of time – especially if you live in the country. There is a level of individual responsibility for caring for possessions."

Bill Roach said, "One phenomenon we experienced last year when fires were burning near communities at night was people calling us saying the fire was 50 yards or closer to their home ... when in fact it was over a mile away. Flames appear much closer when it's dark. One way to tell how close the fire truly is – is to look at your home and see if there is ash falling on it or on you. Also, can you smell heavy smoke? If you can see flames at night, but you can't smell smoke and no ash is falling on you – the fire is far away."

"Our fire fighters are concerned with protecting your life and structures, but we're only as good as Mother Nature allows us to be," Turk concluded.

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